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ABSTRACT

This research examined teacher behavior as a primary source of data collection and analysis for study of teacher failure. The results of two studies using the teacher-perceived problems procedure developed by Donald R. Cruickshank are reported. Study I surveyed 120 experienced elementary teachers enrolled in a master's program; Study II involved a sample of student teachers engaged in a Right-to-Read Project. All subjects completed the Teacher Problems Checklist (TPC) based on 66 most common problems identified by teachers. The two studies revealed significant limitations in the TPC instrument's validity and accountability for geographic and cultural variables. (MM)

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A Critique of a Research Instrument Involving Teacher Perceived Problems As Seen By Pre-and In-Service Teachers

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PURPOSES OF THIS REPORT

The primary purpose is to contribute to the research data base in the area of teacher perceived problems as developed in the research instrument called the (TPC).

Another purpose in this report is to summarize briefly the results obtained from two research studies conducted in the College of Education, Eastern Kentucky University.

The last purpose is to increase further inquiry into the usability of teacher perceived problems both as a basis for teacher education curricula and as a focus for in-service education programs.

BACKGROUND

The research instrument referred to in this report was developed by Donald R. Cruickshank (1975) of the Ohio State University. It essentially examines teacher perceived problems. It is used in many different settings, in teacher preparation programs and in-service education programs. The samples tested in this report include urban, rural, elementary and secondary teachers. Our report contains two studies in which basically the Cruickshank type instrument was used. Study I includes a sample of 120 elementary teachers enrolled in a masters program. Study II involves a sample of student teachers engaged in a Right-to-Read Project.

In Study II Cruickshank makes claim that utilizing perceived problems of teachers for inclusion for study in teacher preparation is promising. It is unique in its approach while at the same time being

pragmatic in nature if it indeed becomes a vital focus in teacher education curricula.

In Study I, the focus is on in-service education. The rationale developed is a concern raised by the (TPC) Teacher Problem Checklist investigators. The concern is that with earlier rating scales used by supervisors and principals, this system was less than valid. This point is given further elaboration in research reported in a 1969 AERA paper that clearly reveals no correlation between a supervisor's rating and a teacher's actual classroom performance Michalak et al (1969). Cruickshank states a belief that principals and supervisors are considered to be reliable and objective, but in a "ubiquitousness" sense regarding teacher rating scales. He further states, "given confidence that teachers can be as reliable and objective as their superordinates, they can be queried and a very rich source of data accumulated which reveals how teachers themselves view life in a classroom or at least the most difficult part of it" (Cruickshank, 1975).

Much enthusiasm existed at the outset of this research effort because the main focus was on examining teacher behavior as a primary source of data collection and analysis. Heretofore, decades of educational study contained a preponderence of research on child behavior. The decades of the sixties and the seventies reveal this current emphasis on studying teacher behavior with a focus usually on observation of classroom performance. The newer dimension Cruickshank brings is based on the work of B.O. Smith. It essentially includes the need to identify and record classroom events of educational significance. The rationale behind this proposition is that teachers fail because they

haven't been exposed to those problems or haven't learned to analyze or interpret the situations clearly (Cruickshank, 1974). The intent of these investigators and developers is to provide for teachers to think systematically, logically and accurately and to apply useful knowledge for making rational decisions. The investigators, namely Cruickshank (1974) went after the "raw problems" from teachers and organized them into the instrument used for this report. As these problems were listed over a ten day period by selected teachers, they were then described, so they could be synthesized and placed in clusters contained in a checklist.. Thus the (TPC) Teacher Problems Checklist contained specific problems and problem clusters that report which problems are most bothersome and occurred most frequently.

DESCRIPTION OF INSTRUMENT

Cruickshank et al (1975) developed the Teacher Problem Checklist (TPC) for several populations using the needs assessment strategy to locate teacher perceived problems. The TPC for elementary teachers was constructed by asking elementary teachers to keep a diary of their most difficult problems. Each day the problem of greatest concern was to be written in the diary for ten consecutive days. The problems were analyzed, resulting in sixty-six most common problems to comprise the TPC.

Subjects were to respond twice to each problem, that is to the frequency and bothersomeness of the problem.

SAMPLE ITEM

FREQUENT					PROBLEMS	BOTHERSOME				
Always		Occasionally		Never	"I Have a Problem."	Extremely		Somewhat		Not at all
☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1	1. Having enough preparation time.	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1

It is easy to see that some problems may be frequent but not very bothersome or others extremely bothersome and not frequent.

The rationale for the instrument is that we all have problems we wish we could handle in a more professional manner. If improvement in teacher education is to occur, we must know the most frequent and bothersome problems encountered by teachers. Thus, future teachers will be better prepared to meet their responsibilites.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

STUDY I

In this study 120 experienced elementary teachers enrolled in a master's program at Eastern Kentucky reponded to the TPC for elementary teachers devised by Cruickshank et al (1969).

The problems were analyzed by calculating a "z" for each item by comparing the overall mean responses to the item means. This was done to identify those which were "significantly" greater than the overall mean. Thus, 2 "z" scores were calculated for each item, one

for the bothersome and one for the frequency scale.

Four items were found to be significant. It is interesting to note that all 4 were both significantly frequent and bothersome at the .05 level. The first 3 items listed below were related to time and the fourth to their student's misuse of time in the classroom.

(1) Having enough time for active teaching with student diagnosis and evaluation to do also

(2) Having enough preparation time

(3) Having enough free time

(4) Getting every student to work up to his ability

STUDY II

Eastern Kentucky University was the recipient of a Federal Right-to-Read project funded from July, 1974 through June, 1976. The main emphasis of the project was to formulate a language experience program for the preparation of student teachers. It appeared to be an excellent opportunity to construct a new evaluation instrument and to test this type of instrument on a different population.

During the Fall 1975, all elementary student teachers were asked to record their biggest teaching problem encountered each day for ten days during their student teaching experience. These responses were analyzed and formulated into the sixty most common problems comprising the Student Teaching Problem Survey (STPS).

The format for the STPS is identical to the Cruickshank TPC. The subjects were asked to respond to both the frequency and bothersomeness of each problem.

The sample consisted of twenty-five non-Right-to-Read student teachers and sixteen Right-to-Read student teachers. At the end of their student teaching experience, both groups were asked to complete the STPS.

Non-Right-to-Read student teachers reported two significant problems that were frequent and had statistical significance.

(1) Everyone wants to talk at the same time

(2) Children would rather ask me for help than to find out for themselves

They also reported two significant problems that were bothersome.

(1) I don't feel there is enough of me to help each child

(2) Keeping the children's attention

Right-to-Read student teachers reported one problem, I don't feel there is enough of me to help each child, as significantly frequent and bothersome. The problem, there is too little time allotted for helping the slow student, was significantly bothersome..

The two groups were compared on the basis of each item using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Two differences were found:

(1) "Speaking correctly in class, using good grammar" was significantly more bothersome at the .01 level for the right-to-read group.

(2) "I use too much verbal punishment" was significantly more bothersome at the .05 level for the Right-to-Read group.

CONCLUSIONS

In Study I it appears that the sample of Kentucky teachers did not have the same problems as Ohio teachers or that Kentucky teachers

were not willing to evaluate themselves.

In Study II it is evident that neither group was willing to evaluate themselves to an extensive degree. It does appear, however, that the Right-to-Read group indicated more concern and empathy than the Non-Right-to-Read group. The latter's answers appear more authoritarian with students in the classroom revealing a greater teacher dependency. The data also yielded an interesting observation: it appears the strong language experience program for the Right-to-Read group produced a sensitivity to their own use of language, "verbal behavior," in the classroom.

SUMMARY STATEMENT ON FINDINGS

The TPC method for constructing instruments has been validated with various groups. The two studies discussed above reveal a limitation on the "transportability" of the instrument to include selected geographic/cultural variables. Disadvantaged and rural populations have found the instrument useful, however, in other areas some regional or psychologic l differences appear lacking as evidenced by the above reported studies to reveal in depth data for closer scrutinization for teacher perceived problems. If the study were to be replicated, appropriate steps will be taken to remove again any "threatening condition" to enable participants to view this study as diagnostic in intent.

CRITIQUE

Providing a critique of a selected research instrument is approached on a strengths and limitations bases. The teacher perceived problems

(TPC) as viewed by the investigators of this report indicates promise such as:

STRENGTHS

(1) Selecting specific teacher or learner behavior as represented in the problem to focus on for change.

(2) Involves teacher input in identification and participation in listing the perceived problem thus the classroom teacher becomes an active agent in the learning process.

(3) Teacher problems present a pragmatic base for teacher change - it is a realistic and concrete approach.

(4) Teacher perceived problems appear to contribute a logical focus in the teacher preparation curriculum.

(5) Teacher perceived problems compliments the areas of research and development in systematic observation and clinical supervision studies - that is the identification, diagnosis and solving of teacher problems is accomplished in systematic fashion and is begun with the teacher as the source of data.

LIMITATIONS

(1) A tendency to view teacher perceived problems in only a "mini" rather than " in macro" view.

(2) Lack of teacher awareness to identify problems accurately.

(3) Tendency in selected situations for teachers to voluntarily engage in problem identification.

(4) Strategies for building teacher confidence rather than resistance for participation in research study and staff development programs - this condition tends to exist also in other socio/economic and geographic settings.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Teacher perceived problems appear to be a logical focus for inclusion in teacher education curricula. Certainly increased study needs to be made to determine to what degree teachers will be more effective as they gain more knowledge about their perceived problems. Since the assumption is made that teachers study and analyze their problem thus intellectualizing their concerns, to what degree will there be a change in their behavior? If a teacher problem is essentially affective in tone, to what degree does intellectualizing contribute to solving this problem? As teachers solve problems, do they realistically rely more on feelings, thinking or both systems for making decisions?

In Study I, a peripheral concern begs the question, under what circumstances, lessening the political, legal and economic conditions, will teachers be given the opportunity to study their perceived problems?

In Study II, if there tends to be an overly emphasis on teacher perceived problems as a focus in teacher education curricula, does a tendency exist for the teacher candidate to perceive that he/she is becoming more of a "professional trouble shooter" rather than a "professional educator"?

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

This new work in the area of teacher perceived problems can gain increased evidence and direction from much work already developed in systematic observation studies mentioned in the follow statements.

The use of data in teacher perceived problems carries potential if it can be placed in a context that is described by Combs (1958), Michalak et al (1969) states that, "Modern psychology tells us that

it is only when knowledge becomes meaning that behavior is affected. If it is meaning that affects human behavior, than it is meaning with which educators must deal."

Researchers such as Hough and Amidon (1967) dealing with feedback from systematic observation studies provide a paraliel with the teacher perceived problems approach. If the above statement about personal meaning affecting human behavior is true, "then the key to changing the behavior of teachers seems to lie in finding ways of helping teachers discover personal meaning in cognitive knowledge regarding the teaching learning process...(p 307)" "Further,the richest environment of stimuli is of little use to a person if he is unable to perceive accurately the stimuli that characterize the environment (p 308)."

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